

The Secret Book of John

(If you want to skip the introduction and just read the text itself, the full text of the Secret Book of John is below.)

Introduction

If there's a single quintessential Gnostic text, it's almost certainly the *Secret Book of John*, also sometimes called the *Apocryphon of John*. ("Apocryphon" is just a fancy word for "secret book.") It's also a landmark text for early Christianity as a whole, because as Karen L. King notes, it "was the first Christian writing to formulate a comprehensive narrative of the nature of God, the origin of the world, and human salvation."^[1]

As its name implies, the *Secret Book of John* was intended to be a supplement to the Gospel of John that conveyed the deeper spiritual meaning and context of John. It was written and used by the group of Gnostics that modern scholars refer to as the ["classic Gnostics" or "Sethians."](#)^[2]

Since the Gospel of John was written in 90-95 AD,^[3] and since the *Secret Book of John* was discussed by the proto-orthodox Christian polemicist [Irenaeus of Lyons](#) around the year 180,^[4] the *Secret Book of John* must have been written sometime between those two dates. It was probably composed in Alexandria, Egypt, which at the time was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Mediterranean world and had a thriving, intellectually active Christian community that was steeped in the Jewish, Greek, and Egyptian lore from which the text draws.^[5]

The *Secret Book of John* holds that knowledge of the origins of the universe and the human condition is essential for spiritual salvation,

and so recounts those origins with the intent of thereby facilitating the salvation of its readers.^[6] [Christ](#) appears in a vision to his distraught apostle John and reveals the secrets about the cosmos and salvation in order to comfort him and point him toward the right path. First, Christ says, there was only [God](#), the One, who is described in mysterious and even deliberately contradictory ways so as to underscore the point that he can't be adequately described in human language. A series of beings arise from God to populate Heaven, which the text calls the "Fullness" (Greek [Pleroma](#)). The first is [Barbelo](#), whom the *Secret Book of John* identifies with the Holy Spirit and the divine Mother of Christ.

After Christ and several other entities who are essentially angels, the last being to emerge from God is Wisdom (or, in Greek, [Sophia](#)). Wisdom wants to give birth to a new being of her own, but does so without the involvement or permission of her partner or God. This rash act, rather than anything Adam and Eve would later do in the Garden of Eden, is the origin of evil. Wisdom's child is the monstrous [demiurge](#), Yaldabaoth, who is cast out of Heaven and goes on to create the mundane material world in which we humans live. After initially trying to conceal her mistake, Wisdom repents of it, which establishes a divine model for human repentance of sin.^[7]

Yaldabaoth and his minions, the "rulers" (Greek [archons](#)), create Adam, the first human, as a way of trapping a spark of divinity in their terrible world so that they can sadistically control it. Emissaries from Heaven come down to earth and try to help Adam and his offspring achieve [gnosis](#), the mystical knowledge of their true nature and home as heavenly beings (and the root of the word "Gnostic"), which provides salvation from the clutches of matter and the rulers of matter. But Yaldabaoth and his forces do everything they can to prevent humankind from attaining gnosis, and so humankind, with its two competing natures, becomes locked in a struggle between these

two sides that continues to this day.

In the interest of eliminating a common source of confusion about the *Secret Book of John*, all of the beings who inhabit Heaven are reflections or copies of God, and so are to some degree interchangeable – just like the three parts of the more familiar later Christian Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is why the text tends to identify them all with each other and sometimes swaps one for another mid-scene in a way that can feel abrupt and jarring.^[8] So don't worry too much about making precise distinctions between Christ, Barbelo, Geradamas, Seth, Life, Reflection, etc. and keeping them straight, because the text itself has them constantly "shapeshifting" back and forth to illustrate the point that ultimately they're all one with God.

Four copies of the *Secret Book of John* have been discovered in modern times. Three come from the [Nag Hammadi Library](#), and the fourth comes from the so-called Berlin Codex. All are Coptic translations, even though the *Secret Book of John* was originally written in Greek. The fact that so many copies of it have been found, along with the fact that Irenaeus felt the need to discuss it at length despite his hostility to it, attests to the text's evident popularity in antiquity.^[9]

The following version of the *Secret Book of John* is my own rendering of the text based on the translations of Bentley Layton^[10] and Marvin Meyer^[11]. My aim has been to produce a version of the text that's clearer and more readable than the available academic translations, while still being closely based on them to ensure accuracy. I hope you find it useful. For more on my methods and goals, see [A Note on My Renderings of the Gnostic Texts](#).

The Secret Book of John

Prologue

This is what the Savior taught, and the mysteries that he disclosed – things that are shrouded in silence, but which he uncovered for his disciple John.

John, the son of Zebedee and the brother of James, went to the temple one day. A Pharisee named Arimanios walked up to him and asked him, "Where is the teacher whom you used to follow?"

I, John, replied, "He has gone back to the place from which he came."

The Pharisee then said to me, "The Nazarene has plugged your ears with his lies, closed your mind, and turned your back on the ways of your ancestors."

When I heard this, I left the temple and fled to a mountain in the desert. I was filled with distress, and I wondered:

How was the Savior chosen?

Why was he sent into this world by his Father?

Who is the Father who sent him?

What is the eternal realm to which we will go?

Why did the Savior say that that eternal realm is modeled on the incorruptible Spirit, yet he did not tell us what that Spirit is like?

As I thought about these questions, the sky suddenly opened, and everything around me glowed and shook. And standing before me, surrounded by the light, was a boy. But as soon as I saw him, he became an elderly man. And then he became a youth. It was not that there were several people standing before me, but one person with several forms. Each of the three forms could be seen within the other.

This person said to me, "John, John, why do you doubt, and why are you afraid? Do you not know who I am? Do not be frightened. I am the one who is with you always. I am the Father, I am the Mother, and I am the Son. I am the one who is without any corruption or defilement. Now I have come to you to teach you about what is, what was, and what will be, so that you may understand what is visible and what is invisible, and so that you may know about the unshakeable race and the perfect man. Lift up your head and listen to what I have to say to you today. Then go and tell my words to your spiritual kin, those who are from the unshakeable race of the perfect man, so that they, too, might know these things."

The One

Then he began to teach me, saying: the One has all power. Nothing rules over it. It is God and it is a Parent, the Father of the Fullness (Pleroma). It presides over the Fullness, the spotless light that no eyes can see. It is the Invisible Spirit.

To call it a god, or to say that it is like a god, is not fitting, for it transcends every god. Nothing is above it or greater than it. Nothing that is inferior to it can contain it, for it contains everything within itself. It is eternally self-sufficient. It is perfect fullness, and it has never lacked anything that would make it more complete. Its light is utter light.

The One is unlimited, because there was never anything that could limit it; unfathomable, because there was never anything that could fathom it; immeasurable, because there was never anything that could measure it; invisible, because it has never been seen; eternal, because it has always existed and always will exist; ineffable, because no one has ever understood it well enough to describe it; and unnamable, because there was never anything that could give it

a name.

It is infinite light, holy and pure. Its perfection cannot be uttered or corrupted. Yet it is not just perfection, blessedness, or divinity – it is far greater than all of these. It is neither corporeal nor incorporeal, neither large nor small. No one can say how much of it there is, or how it can be classified, because no one can comprehend it. It does not exist in the way that other things exist, for it is far superior to them. But it is not superior to them; rather, it exists apart from them, apart from time. For whatever exists in time has been conditioned by another. No one gave it a span of time, for no one can give it anything. That which was first to exist does not need anything from anyone else in order to exist. All it sees is its own perfect light.

The One is majesty and total purity, eternity that grants eternity, life that grants life, blessedness that grants blessedness, gnosis that grants gnosis, goodness that grants goodness, mercy that grants mercy, grace that grants grace. But the One does not have any of these things. Rather, what it has to give is inexhaustible, inextinguishable light.

What can be said about it? Its eternal realm cannot be corrupted. Its peace, its silence, its rest cannot be disturbed. It is before and above all that exists, and by its goodness it sustains all. We cannot know what cannot be spoken of or measured, except through the one who has come from the light of the Father. Such a one showed us these things.

The Unfolding of the Fullness

The Father gazes at himself in the light that surrounds him, the wellspring of living water that sustains all the realms. He sees his reflection everywhere in these spiritual waters, and because of this, his love goes out to all this resplendent water.

This loving thought became a new entity. Through her, his thought was revealed in the brilliance of the light. She is the first power, the being who came into being before all other beings. She arose from his mind as the perfect Forethought of the Fullness. Her light is like the Father's light, as she is the reflection of the Perfect Invisible Virgin Spirit.

She is Barbelo, the most perfect glory of all beings, the glory of the disclosure of the Father's thought. Her own first thought was to glorify and praise the Virgin Spirit from whom she had come forth.

Barbelo became the womb of the Fullness, for she was the first being, the Mother-Father, the first human, the holy spirit, the thrice-male, the triple power, the three-named androgynous being, the first among the invisible beings.

Barbelo requested that the Invisible Virgin Spirit grant her a gift: Foreknowledge. The Spirit agreed and revealed Foreknowledge, which stood at rest next to Forethought. Foreknowledge glorified the Spirit and Barbelo, the perfect power of the Spirit, for it was because of her that Foreknowledge had come to be.

Barbelo made another request: that she be given Incorruptibility. The Spirit agreed, and Incorruptibility appeared and stood at rest next to Forethought and Foreknowledge. Incorruptibility glorified the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo, those who had enabled it to live.

Barbelo made another request: that she be given Eternal Life. The Spirit agreed, and Eternal Life appeared and stood at rest next to the others. They glorified the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo, those who had enabled them to live.

Again Barbelo asked for a gift – this time, it was Truth. The Invisible Spirit agreed, and Truth appeared and stood at rest next to the

others. They glorified the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo, those who had enabled them to live.

These are the five entities of the Father:

The first human, the reflection of the Invisible Spirit, Forethought, Barbelo;

Foreknowledge;

Incorruptibility;

Eternal Life;

Truth.

These are the five androgynous beings, who with their partners are a group of ten entities, and together they are the Father.

As Barbelo now stood amidst the untainted light that surrounds the Father and upon which the Father gazes, the Father gazed into her, and she conceived by him. She begot a spark of light that resembled the Father's blessed light, but was not as great. This spark was the only-begotten Son of the Mother-Father and the only-begotten Son of the Father, the pure light.

The Invisible Virgin Spirit was overjoyed at this newborn light that had shone forth from Barbelo, the Forethought of the Father, the first power. The Spirit anointed the new light with his goodness until it, too, was perfectly good, needing no further goodness to complete it. The Son stood at rest in the presence of the Spirit as the Spirit poured his goodness upon the Son. Once the anointing was complete, not a moment passed before the Son glorified the Spirit and perfect Forethought, from whom he had come forth.

The Son then asked for a companion: Mind. The Spirit agreed, and Mind came into being. It stood at rest next to Christ, the anointed Son, and glorified Barbelo and the Spirit, in whose silence it had come to be.

Mind desired to make something through the Word of the Invisible Spirit. Its Will became something new, and stood within the light, glorifying it. Will was followed by Word. For it was through the Word that Christ, the Self-Made Son, made the Fullness. Word, Will, Eternal Life, and Foreknowledge stood side by side and glorified the Father and Barbelo, those through whom they had come to be.

The Great Invisible Spirit took the Self-Made Son, the child of the Spirit and Barbelo, and made him perfect so that he could stand at rest next to the Great Invisible Virgin Spirit. The Self-Made Son, Christ, the light of Forethought, glorified the Spirit with resounding praise. And the Invisible Virgin Spirit placed the Self-Made Son at the head of the Fullness and made all authority and all truth subject to him, so that he would know all there is to know about the Fullness. His name is greater than every other name, and it will be told to those who are worthy of hearing it.

Then from Incorruptibility, from the grace of the Spirit, from the light of Christ, Four Luminaries arose from the Self-Made Son and gazed out so that they could stand before him in his light. With them were Will, Thought, Life, Understanding, Grace, Perception, and Thoughtfulness.

The first of the Four Luminaries is the angel Harmozel, and three other beings dwell in his realm: Grace, Truth, and Form.

The second of the Four Luminaries is the angel Oroiael, and three other beings dwell in his realm: Insight, Perception, and Memory.

The third of the Four Luminaries is the angel Daveithai, and three other beings dwell in his realm: Understanding, Love, and Idea.

The fourth of the Four Luminaries is the angel Eleleth, and three other beings dwell in his realm: Perfection, Peace, and Wisdom

(Sophia).

These are the Four Luminaries who stand before the Self-Made Son, and these are the twelve beings who stand before them, through the will and the grace of the Invisible Spirit. The twelve beings belong to the Self-Made Son. And through the will of the blessed Spirit and the Self-Made Son, the Fullness was strong.

Then from Foreknowledge and perfect Mind, through the revelation of the desire of the Invisible Spirit and the Self-Made Son, the perfect man came forth. The Virgin Spirit named the perfect man "Geradamas," and placed him in the realm of the first Luminary, that of Harmozel, where he would dwell close to Christ and the power of that Self-Made Son. The Invisible Spirit made his mind invincible.

Geradamas spoke for the first time and glorified the Invisible Spirit with these words: "Because of you the Fullness has been made, and to you the Fullness shall return. I praise you and glorify you, and Barbelo, and the Self-Made Son – the Father, the Mother, and the Son – the perfect power."

The One placed Geradamas's son, Seth, in the realm of the second Luminary, that of Oroiael. And in the realm of the third Luminary, that of Daveithai, the Invisible Spirit placed the race of Seth and the souls of holy men and women. Then in the realm of the fourth Luminary, that of Eleleth, he placed the souls of those who did not know the Fullness and did not repent as soon as they could have, but held out longer, yet still repented in the end.

And all of these beings glorified the Invisible Spirit.

The Fall of Wisdom

Wisdom had inherited the power of thought from the Invisible Spirit

and Forethought. She, too, wanted to give birth to a being that was like her, but the Invisible Spirit had not approved of this. Wisdom's partner, the male being who was in harmony with her, had also not consented to this. Nor did he join in this act in any way. But Wisdom desired to do this anyway, without her partner and without the Invisible Spirit. Alone, she conceived a new thought. Due to the unstoppable power within her, her thought was not an idle one. Something emerged from her, something that was not like her, something flawed, something misshapen, for she had made it without her partner.

The product of Wisdom's desire had the body of a snake and the face of a lion. His eyes glared like bolts of lightning. As soon as she saw him, she flung him away from her, outside the Fullness, and hoped that none of the other divine beings would see him, for she had made a dreadful mistake by giving birth to him. She wrapped him in a shining cloud and dreamed that no one would be able to see him inside it. In the middle of the cloud she placed a throne for him. And she called him "Yaldabaoth."

The Creation of the World

The first ruler (archon) – for so Yaldabaoth was – had inherited immense power from his mother. He slunk away from her and the place of his birth until he found somewhere new. He took control of that place. Using fire, he created new realms within it, realms which still exist to this day. He became infatuated with the foolishness within himself, and from this he engendered other rulers (archons) to help him:

The first is named Athoth, whom the nations call the reaper;
The second is Harmas, who is the evil eye;
The third is Kalila-Oumbri;

The fourth is Yabel;
The fifth is Adonaïos, who is also called "Sabaoth;"
The sixth is Cain, whom the nations call the "sun;"
The seventh is Abel;
The eighth is Abrisene;
The ninth is Yobel;
The tenth is Armoupieel;
The eleventh is Melcheir-Adonein;
And the twelfth is Belias, who reigns over the depths of the underworld.

Yaldabaoth placed a ruler in each of the seven spheres of heaven, and he placed five in the depths of the abyss. He shared some of his fire with them, but because of his darkness and ignorance, he withheld the power of the light that he had gotten from his mother. For when light mingled with darkness, the darkness shone brightly, but when darkness mingled with light it darkened the light, so that it was neither dark nor bright, but dim.

Now this dim ruler has three names:

The first name is Yaldabaoth,
The second is Saklas,
And the third is Samael.

The first ruler is evil because of the madness inside him. He said, "I am God, and there are no other gods besides me," for he was not aware of the source of his power.

Each of the rulers made seven powers for themselves, and each of the powers made six angels for themselves, until there were 365 angels. These are the names and appearances of the seven who preside over the seven days of the week:

The first is Athoth, who has the face of a sheep;
The second is Eloaios, who has the face of a donkey;
The third is Astaphaios, who has the face of a hyena;
The fourth is Yao, who has seven snake heads;
The fifth is Sabaoth, who has the face of a dragon;
The sixth is Adonin, who has the face of an ape;
And the seventh is Sabbataios, who has the face of a burning fire.

As for Yaldabaoth, he has many faces, all of these and more. He could show whichever one he wanted to his angels when he was among them. He shared his fire with them, and through that fire he dominated them, because the radiant power of his mother's glory was within it. He called himself "God" because of this power; he did not believe in the source of that power, the one who had given it to him.

Yaldabaoth mixed with the rulers who were with him. Through his thought and his speech, the seven powers were brought forth. He gave them these names, beginning with the highest:

The first is Goodness, and with it the first power, Athoth;
The second is Forethought, and with it the second power, Eloaios;
The third is Divinity, and with it the third power, Astaphaios;
The fourth is Lordship, and with it the fourth power, Yao;
The fifth is Kingship, and with it the fifth power, Sabaoth;
The sixth is Zeal, and with it the sixth power, Adonin;
And the seventh is Understanding, and with it the seventh power, Sabbataios.

Each of these has a realm in its own heavenly sphere. The names given to them by their creator made them powerful, but they were also given names after the glory of the Fullness, which rendered them powerless in the face of their own destruction. That is why they

have two names.

The first ruler created the universe according to the model of the original realms, so that everything he made might be incorruptible. For even though he had never seen the original, incorruptible realms, he had their model within him from the power he had received from his mother.

When Yaldabaoth looked out upon the world he had made and the hosts of angels that he had brought forth, he proclaimed, "I am a jealous God and there is no other god but me." But by declaring this, he made it known to his angels that there was indeed another god besides him. For if he were truly the only god, of whom could he be jealous?

Wisdom's Repentance

Yaldabaoth's mother started to move. She saw that her light had dimmed, and she knew that she lacked something. She had grown dark because she had brought forth something without her partner.

I, John, asked the Savior: "Lord, what do you mean when you say that she 'moved?'"

He laughed and replied: Do not assume that it means that she moved "over the waters," as Moses claimed. No, instead she saw the horror that had come into being and the theft of her power by her son, and she repented.

In her darkness, she had become forgetful and ignorant, and this, in turn, made her ashamed. To attempt to return to the Fullness would have been rash, but her state caused her to be agitated. And her agitation is what has been called "movement."

The conceited ruler had taken his power from his mother. He lacked gnosis, for he thought that no one but his mother had existed before him. When he saw the host of angels he had created, he praised himself and lorded over them.

When his mother saw that this being of darkness was so twisted, she knew that it was because her partner had not been in harmony with her when she gave birth. Many tears flowed from her as she repented.

All the Fullness heard her prayer for repentance and spoke to the Invisible Spirit on her behalf, praising her to him. The Spirit agreed to their request and poured some of the Fullness over her. Her partner, rather than coming to her on his own, came to her through this outpouring of the Fullness, so that he could mend her deficiency. But because of the existence of her son, she still lacked something. Rather than being taken back into the Fullness, she was placed just outside of it in the ninth heaven, above the realm of her son, the eighth heaven, until she acquired what she was still missing.

The Creation of Adam

A voice bellowed from the sublime realms, "Man exists, and the Son of Man."

Yaldabaoth, the first ruler, heard these words and thought that they had come from his mother, for he did not know their true source.

The holy Mother-Father, perfect Forethought, the image of the Invisible Spirit, the mother of the Fullness, the one in whom the Fullness had come into being, the first human, appeared to the rulers in the image of a human. Tremors rumbled through the realm of the first ruler and rocked the foundations of the abyss. The waters that lie above the material world were lit up by the glowing image, and by

this light the rulers saw the image. They were speechless.

Yaldabaoth said to the rulers, "Come, let us make a man after this heavenly image, but also in our own image, so that this man may bring us light."

They created with their own powers, in accordance with their own characters. Each of the powers contributed something to the man that corresponded to a part of the image they had seen, the image of the perfect first human. And they said, "Let us name him Adam, so that his name will be a shining power for us."

So the powers began:

The first, Goodness, gave him a soul of bone.

The second, Forethought, gave him a soul of sinew.

The third, Divinity, gave him a soul of muscle.

The fourth, Lordship, gave him a soul of marrow.

The fifth, Kingship, gave him a soul of blood.

The sixth, Zeal, gave him a soul of skin.

And the seventh, Understanding, gave him a soul of hair.

The multitude of the rulers received these seven substances from the seven rulers who had created them. Now it was their turn to use these substances to create all the particular parts of the body, and in the proper arrangement.

The first of these rulers, Raphao, began by creating the crown of his head.

Then Abron created his skull,

Meniggesstroeth created his brain,

Asterechme created his right eye,

Thaspomocha created his left eye,

Yeronumos created his right ear,

Bissoum created his left ear,

Akioreim created his nose,
Banen-Ephroum created his lips,
Amen created his teeth,
Ibikan created his molars,
Basiliademe created his tonsils,
Achcha created his uvula,
Adaban created his neck,
Chaaman created his vertebrae,
Dearcho created his throat,
Tebar the right shoulder,
[Text missing] created his left shoulder,
Mniarchon created his right elbow,
[Text missing] created his left elbow,
Abitrion created his right armpit,
Euanthen created his left armpit,
Krus created his right hand,
Beluai created his left hand,
Treneu created the fingers of his right hand,
Balbel created the fingers of his left hand,
Krima created his fingernails,
Astrops created his right nipple,
Barroph created his left nipple,
Baoum created his right shoulder joint,
Ararim created his left shoulder joint,
Arekh created his body cavity,
Phthaue created his navel,
Senaphim created his abdomen,
Arachethopi created his right ribs,
Zabedo created his left ribs,
Barias created his right hip,
Phnouth created his left hip,
Abenlenarchei created his marrow,

Chnoumeninorin created his bones,
Gesole created his stomach,
Agromauma created his heart,
Bano created his lungs,
Sostrapal created his liver,
Anesimalar created his spleen,
Thopithro created his intestines,
Biblo created his kidneys,
Roeror created his sinews,
Taphreo created his vertebrae,
Ipouspoboba created his veins,
Bineborin created his arteries,
Aatoimenpsephei created the air in his limbs,
Entholleia created all his flesh,
Bedouk created his right buttock,
Arabeei created his left buttock,
[Text missing] created his penis,
Eilo created his testicles,
Sorma created his genitals,
Gormakaochlabar created his right thigh,
Nebrith created his left thigh,
Pserem created the muscles of his right leg,
Asaklas created the muscles of his left leg,
Ormaoth created his right leg,
Emenun created his left leg,
Knux created his right shin,
Tupelon created his left shin,
Achiel created his right ankle,
Phneme created his left ankle,
Phiouthrom created his right foot,
Boabel created his toes,
Trachoun created his left foot,

Phikna created his toes,
Miamai created his toenails,
And Labernioum created his [text missing].

Seven were appointed to rule over all these parts: Athoth, Armas,
Kalila, Yabel, Sabaoth, Cain, and Abel.

And those who enable the limbs to move and function, along with
their particular parts, are:

Diolimodraza, who moves the head;
Yammeax moves the neck,
Yakouib moves the right shoulder,
Ouerton moves the left shoulder,
Oudidi moves the right hand,
Arbao moves the left hand,
Lampno moves the fingers of the right hand,
Leekaphar moves the fingers of the left hand,
Barbar moves the right breast,
Imae moves the left breast,
Pisandraptres moves the chest,
Koade moves the right shoulder joint,
Odeor moves the left shoulder joint,
Asphixix moves the right ribs,
Sunogchouta moves the left ribs,
Arouph moves the body cavity,
Sabalo moves the abdomen,
Charcharb moves the right thigh,
Chthaon moves the left thigh,
Bathinoth moves the genitals,
Choux moves the right leg,
Charcha moves the left leg,
Aroer moves the right shin,

Toecktha moves the left shin,
Aol moves the right ankle,
Charaner moves the left ankle,
Bastan moves the right foot,
Archentechtha moves the toes of the right foot,
Marephnouth moves the left foot,
And Abrana moves the toes of the left foot.

Seven were appointed to rule over all of these parts: Michael, Uriel,
Asmenedass, Saphasatoel, Aarmouriam, Richram, and Amiorps.

Archendekta has power over the senses,
Deitharbathas has power over perception,
Oummaa has power over imagination,
Aachiarum has power over reflection,
And Riaramnacho has power over impulse.

All the demons in all the body have four sources: heat, cold, wetness,
and dryness. Matter is the mother of all of them.

Phloxopha rules over heat,
Oroorrothos rules over cold,
Erimacho rules over dryness,
And Athuro rules over wetness.

Onorthochras is the mother of them all and stands in their midst. She
is unlimited and is within all of them. She is matter, and they receive
their nourishment from her.

There are four main demons:
Ephememphi is the demon of pleasure,
Yoko is the demon of desire,
Nenentophni is the demon of grief,
And Blaomen is the demon of fear.

Esthesis-Ouch-Epi-Ptoe is their mother.

Passions come from these four demons.

The passions that come from grief are envy, zealotry, pain, distress, anxiety, acrimony, contention, and anguish.

The passions that come from pleasure are a great many: boastful arrogance and the like.

The passions that come from desire are anger, enmity, bitterness, lust, avarice, and the like.

The passions that come from fear are terror, subservience, agony, and shame.

The nature of these vices is exemplified by Anaro, who rules over the material soul, and who nests with Esthesis-Z-Ouch-Epi-Ptoe.

These are the angels of the first ruler. In total, there are 365 of them. They labored together until at last, piece by piece, they had created the first human body.

But the first ruler has other angels, too, ones I have not mentioned to you today. These control the rest of the passions. If you wish to learn about them as well, consult the *Book of Zoroaster*, which has much to teach about these matters.

Adam Is Brought to Life and Imprisoned

All of Yaldabaoth's angels toiled until, at last, Adam's body was complete. But it lay motionless and lifeless on the ground.

Wisdom, meanwhile, wanted to take back the power that had passed from her and into the first ruler. So she prayed to the merciful

Mother-Father of the Fullness, who heard her plea. With numinous words, the Mother-Father commanded five luminaries to go down to the place where the angels of the first ruler had congregated and advise the first ruler in such a way that Wisdom's power might be recovered.

The five luminaries counseled Yaldabaoth, "Blow some of your spirit into Adam's face, and his body will stand up." Yaldabaoth did so, breathing some of his spirit, the power he had received from his mother, into Adam. The first ruler did not realize what he was doing, for he lacks understanding. Thus the power from his mother left him and entered into Adam, the body that had been made after the image of the entity who had existed before any other entity.

Adam's body began to move and find its strength. He glowed with the splendor of gnosis.

The rulers immediately became jealous. Through their own efforts, Adam had been created, and their own power empowered him, yet he was more enlightened than they and their master. When they saw how he glowed, how he was more intelligent than they, and how he was free from their evil and deficiency, they seized him and cast him into the lowest part of the whole material world.

But the blessed, compassionate Mother-Father saw that the rulers were attempting to gain control over the body that now contained the power from Wisdom that had been salvaged from the first ruler. So out of marvelous benevolence and mercy, the Mother-Father sent a helper to Adam: enlightened Reflection, who had come from the Mother-Father and was called Life. She worked with Adam, helping him to perceive the way to the Fullness, teaching him about his lineage and about the ways of ascent and descent. And enlightened Reflection concealed herself within Adam so that the rulers would

not detect her as she strove to rescue the missing part of Wisdom.

The perfect man within Adam was revealed by the shadow of the light inside him, and his mind was stronger and more capable than the minds of his creators. His creators could not help but notice this whenever they saw him. So the whole multitude of rulers came together to decide what to do about this. They gathered fire, earth, and water, and with a great clamor and tumult forged them together with four burning winds.

The rulers dragged Adam into the shadow of death, where they made many changes to his body. They used earth, water, fire, and the spirit that comes from matter – that is, from the darkness of ignorance, and passion, and their own counterfeit spirit. In that cave, the robbers reforged Adam's body, binding him in the chains of forgetfulness. He became mortal and alienated from his ultimate nature.

But enlightened Reflection stayed within him, working to elevate his thoughts.

The Garden of Eden

The rulers led Adam to a garden full of edible plants and commanded him to eat for pleasure. But what is pleasurable to the rulers is actually bitter, and what is beautiful to them is actually grotesque. Their happiness is fraudulent, their trees are blasphemies, their fruits are lethal poisons, and their promise is death.

And in the middle of that garden the rulers planted the tree of their life.

Now I will teach you what the secret of their life is, what the character of their spirit is, and what plan they concocted with each

other. The root of their tree is nasty, its branches are deadly, its shade is full of hate, its leaves are full of deceit, its flowers anoint one with evil, its fruit is death, its seed is passion, and it blossoms in the dark. Those who eat of it dwell in the underworld, and darkness is their place of rest.

The rulers called enlightened Reflection the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," and they stood in front of her in the hope that Adam would not glimpse her Fullness and see his shameful nakedness for what it was.

But I, the Savior, coaxed Adam to eat of its fruit.

I, John, asked the Savior: "Lord, was it not the snake who convinced Adam to eat?"

The Savior laughed and replied, "The snake told Adam to eat of the rulers' flawed and corrupted food, which consists of desire, so that Adam would become useful to them. The first ruler knew that Adam was disobeying him because of enlightened Reflection dwelling within him and making his thinking clearer and sharper than that of the first ruler. For this reason, the first ruler decided to attempt to take back the power that he had imparted to Adam. So he made a deep sleep fall over Adam."

I asked the Savior, "What do you mean by 'deep sleep?'"

The Savior answered: It is not what you have heard from Moses, who said that the first ruler made Adam lie down. Instead, it refers to Adam's perception. For as Yaldabaoth said through another prophet, "I will dull their minds, so that their eyes will not be able to see and their thoughts will not be able to comprehend."

Enlightened Reflection hid from Yaldabaoth inside Adam, because

the first ruler wanted to tear her out of his side. But darkness cannot grasp enlightened Reflection. So Yaldabaoth seized part of his own power from Adam and performed another act of creation. He made this new creature female after the image of enlightened Reflection that he had seen. And he put the power he had taken from Adam – not his rib, as Moses said – into her.

Adam gazed at the woman who now stood next to him. At that moment, enlightened Reflection revealed herself. She pulled away the veil that the first ruler had draped over Adam's mind. Where before he had been in a dark, drunken stupor, he now found himself sober. Recognizing his spiritual partner, he said, "Her bones are my bones, and her flesh is my flesh." A man leaves his father and mother for such a wife, and the two of them become one, for his true love has been sent to him.

Now Wisdom, our sister who had innocently descended to earth in the form of enlightened Reflection to find what she lacked, was called Life – the mother of the living – by the Forethought of the Invisible Spirit. Thanks to Wisdom, the living have been able to taste perfect gnosis.

For my part, I took the form of an eagle and landed on the tree of gnosis – which is the Reflection that came from completely enlightened Forethought – so that I could teach humankind and lift them out of the depths of sleep. Through my teaching, Adam and Eve realized that they were living in naked corpses. And enlightened Reflection continued to elevate their thoughts.

When Yaldabaoth saw that humankind had turned away from him, he cursed the earth he had made. He did not perceive the mystery that had been introduced by the divine plan. In an act that showed his angels just how obtuse he was, he expelled Adam and Eve from the

garden and gave them inky darkness for clothes.

The Children of Eve

The first ruler looked at Eve standing next to Adam, and saw that the enlightened Reflection of Life resided within her. He was consumed by an ignorant desire. The Forethought of the Fullness saw this and immediately sent emissaries to snatch Life out of Eve. Yaldabaoth found Eve while she was preparing herself for Adam, and he overpowered her and defiled her.

Eve became pregnant and gave birth to two sons, Elohim and Yahweh. Elohim has a bear's face, and Yahweh has a cat's face. Yahweh is just, but Elohim is unjust. Yaldabaoth put Yahweh in control of fire and wind, and Elohim in control of water and earth. So as to trick others, he called them "Cain" and "Abel."

Sexual intercourse is part of the world to this day because of this atrocity committed by the first ruler. He sowed the seed of lust in humankind, and through sex they multiplied, producing more and more bodies into which the counterfeit god could breathe his counterfeit spirit. And he placed Yahweh and Elohim in charge of the cave where humankind lived.

But when Adam recognized in Eve the counterpart of his own gnosis, a son was born who was like the Son of Man. They named him "Seth" after the being in the eternal realms. And the Mother placed in Eve her own spirit in the form of a girl who would be like the beings who dwell in the Fullness. Then the Mother went back up to prepare eternal homes for those who were going to descend from Seth and his sister.

The first ruler forced humankind to drink from the waters of forgetfulness so that they would no longer know themselves, nor the

place from which they had come. The race of Seth and his sister stayed on earth for a while and helped the others who were trapped there, so that when Forethought comes down from the eternal realms, those to whom she comes will be ready to be healed of their deficiency. In this way, all the Fullness might once again be holy and whole.

The Salvation of Humankind

I, John, asked the Savior, "Lord, will every soul be saved and make it back to the pure light?"

He said in response, "Weighty matters have arisen in your thoughts. It is difficult to speak of them with anyone but those who belong to the unshakeable race, those to whom the spirit of Life has come, and in whom she dwells with power. Such people will be saved and become perfect and worthy of greatness. They will be healed of every wound and of all the anxieties that come with wickedness; they will be anxious for nothing but the incorruptible, and will meditate on it without anger, envy, resentment, passion, or greed. Their only constraint is the incidental body of flesh that they provisionally wear, and they await the time when those bodies will be removed from them. Such souls are worthy of the call to eternal, incorruptible life. They bear all things and endure all things so that they might finish the race and be awarded eternal life."

I asked him, "Lord, what about those to whom the spirit of Life has come, but who have not performed these deeds? Will they, too, be saved?"

He answered, "If the spirit of Life descends to them, then they shall surely be saved and transformed. Power descends to everyone, for without it, no one could even stand upright. After they are born, the counterfeit spirit of Life is placed in them. But if the true spirit of Life

comes with its power, the soul grows strong and is kept from wickedness. The others, however, are misled by the counterfeit spirit and go astray."

Then I asked, "Lord, where do souls go when they are removed from flesh?"

He laughed and said to me, "The soul that is more powerful than the counterfeit spirit is strong indeed. It escapes from evil, and with the aid of the incorruptible One it is saved and led to the repose of the eternal realm."

But I wondered, "Lord, what will happen to the souls of those who have not known where their true home is?"

He replied, "As for them, because they have gone so far astray, the counterfeit spirit has grown strong in them. It weighs down their souls and plunges them into slumber. Meanwhile, it tempts them into committing wicked acts. After their souls have come forth from their bodies, they are delivered into the hands of the rulers who exist because of the first ruler. The rulers shackle such souls with chains and throw them into another fleshly prison. The rulers push them through endless repetitions of this cycle until the soul wakes up from the sleep of forgetfulness and obtains gnosis. It thereby becomes perfect and attains salvation."

Next, I asked him, "Lord, how can the soul become younger and younger and return to the womb of its mother, the first human?"

His face became happy, and he said to me, "You are truly blessed, for you have grasped quite a lot! The soul will be guided by another in whom the spirit of Life dwells, and by that guidance it will attain salvation so that it will not be cast back into the flesh ever again."

I put another question to him: "Lord, what will happen to the souls of those who obtain gnosis but turn away?"

He answered, "They will be ushered to the place where the angels of pain go, where no repentance makes a difference. They will be held there until the day arrives when the eternal punishment and torture of those who have blasphemed against the Spirit will begin."

The Counterfeit Spirit

Finally, I asked him, "Lord, where did the counterfeit spirit come from?"

He responded: The mercy and grace of the Mother-Father, the Reflection of enlightened Forethought, are boundless. This parent raised the children of the perfect race, elevated their minds, and lifted their eyes to the eternal light of the human.

When the first ruler saw that they were better than him and that their thinking was better than his, he wished to grasp their thoughts. He did not realize that their thinking outdid his to such an extent that he would not be able to grasp it. In the company of his minions, he came up with a plan.

The rulers took turns fornicating with Wisdom, who then gave birth to woeful fate, which varies from person to person so much because so many rulers participated in its conception. To this day, fate is more durable and powerful than anything else that has ever been experienced by gods, angels, demons, or humankind. For fate has been the source of all iniquity, violence, blasphemy, forgetfulness, and ignorance of gnosis, as well as all of the rules, sins, and fears that oppress people so much. It has made all of creation blind so that they might not see the God above them. Because of the manacles of forgetfulness, it has hidden their sins from them. And through their

entrapment in space and time, it has dominated them.

The first ruler deplored everything he had created and wished he had never made anything. So he came up with a new plan: to drown humankind in a flood.

But Forethought, with the splendor of her enlightenment, warned Noah, who then told all the children of humankind. But those who did not know him disregarded his words.

They did not, as Moses said, take refuge in an ark, but in a shining cloud – not only Noah, but many others from the unshakeable race. And though the darkness of the first ruler had covered all the earth, the luminous being who had enlightened them was there with them.

The first ruler again gathered his officials and made another plan. He sent his angels to the daughters of humankind, to take some of them for themselves, to conceive children who would please them. But this plan did not succeed, so they assembled together again and hatched another plan. This time, in order to contaminate the souls of the beings they had created, they made a counterfeit spirit in the image of the spirit that had descended from the Fullness. The rulers shapeshifted into the forms of the husbands of the women, and filled them with the spirit of darkness and evil that they had created.

Then the rulers came to them with gold, silver, copper, iron, and all kinds of other worldly gifts, tricking their followers into anxiety over these precious materials and leading them to commit countless errors. Humankind grew old without ever being able to rest, and died without ever discovering any truth or the God of truth. In this manner all creation was continually enslaved from the establishment of the world until today.

The rulers took women and sired children in the image of their dark

spirit – children whose hearts and minds were coarse through the coarseness of the counterfeit spirit, from that day until this day.

The Hymn of the Savior

I, the perfect Forethought of the Fullness,
Have transformed myself into my children.
Before anything else was, I am.
I have traveled all the paths there are to travel.
I am the riches of the light.
I am the memory of the Fullness.
I traversed the thick darkness,
Not stopping until I came to its prison.
The foundations of chaos trembled.
I hid from all the evil ones
And, unnoticed, passed by them.
A second time I went there
And appeared to the beings of light –
I, the memory of Forethought.
I infiltrated the dark depths of Hades
In pursuit of my goal.
The foundations of chaos trembled
As if to collapse on those who live in chaos and crush them.
And again I hurried back to my luminous root,
For the day of their demise had not yet come.
A third time I went there,
I, the light that shines within the light,
I, the memory of Forethought,
So as to penetrate the dark depths of Hades.
My face beamed with the glow that would destroy that place
As I came to the heart of their prison:
The prison of the body.
I said, "Whoever has ears to hear,

Arise from your sleep."
Someone wept heavy tears,
Wiped them away, and wondered:
"Who is that who calls my name?
Where has my hope come from,
As I lie in chains in prison?"
I answered, "I am the Forethought of perfect light,
The thought of the Virgin Spirit,
Who guides you to the seat of honor.
Arise! For you have heard me.
Discover your root, which is I, the benevolent.
Shield yourself from the angels of pain,
The demons of chaos, and their snares.
Stay alert, now that you are awake
And have taken off your prison clothes."
I raised and sealed that person
With the glowing water of the Five Seals
So that, from that time on,
Death would lose its grip on that one.

Conclusion

And the Savior said to John, "Now I will return to the perfect eternal realm. I have told you all that your ears longed to hear. I have told you all these things so that you may record them and pass them on in secret to those who are your spiritual kin. For this is the mystery of the unshakeable race."

The Savior delivered these words to John for him to transcribe them and guard them. He said to John, "Cursed be anyone who sells these secrets for money, food, drink, clothing, or anything else."

These things were revealed to him spiritually, and then the Savior

vanished from John's sight. And immediately John went to his fellow disciples and told them what the Savior had told him.

Jesus is the Christ! Amen.

References:

[1] King, Karen L. 2006. *The Secret Revelation of John*. Harvard University Press. p. vii.

[2] Brakke, David. 2010. *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*. Harvard University Press. p. 50-51.

[3] Ehrman, Bart. 2004. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, Third Edition*. Oxford University Press. p. xxxii.

[4] King, Karen L. 2006. *The Secret Revelation of John*. Harvard University Press. p. 17.

[5] Ibid. p. 13-17.

[6] Lewis, Nicola Denzey. 2013. *Introduction to "Gnosticism:" Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds*. Oxford University Press. p. 132.

[7] Ibid. p. 158-159.

[8] Ibid. p. 153-154.

[9] Ibid. p. 150.

[10] Layton, Bentley (trans.). 1987. "The Secret Book According to John." In *The Gnostic Scriptures*. Doubleday. p. 28-51.

[11] Meyer, Marvin (trans.). 2008. "The Secret Book of John." In *The Nag Hammadi Library*. Edited by Marvin Meyer. p. 107-132.

